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NEGRO FARMERS OF VIRGINIA



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VIRGINIA FARM-DEMONSTRATION AGENTS

NEGRO FARMERS OF VIRGINIA

BY WILLIAM ANTHONY AERY

SOME 5000 Negro farmers of Virginia, under the leadership of John B. Pierce, who is a Tuskegee-Hampton product, were influenced in the single calendar year of 1916 to improve their methods of work and secure crop yields far beyond the expectations of the most hopeful advocates of the farm-demonstration idea.

Eighteen local farm-demonstration agents working in twenty-two counties of Virginia, under the States Relations Service, South,—the fruition itself of the epoch-making work of Seaman A. Knapp,—have brought to the Negro farmers, not only new ideas and better methods of tilling the soil and caring for farm products, but also a new vision of farm life, a clearer insight into farming as a business rather than as a mere occupation, and a deeper sense of responsibility for the all-round education of their boys and girls.

BETTER CORN : BETTER PEOPLE

Let facts tell the story of organization's gift to Virginia ; for whatever helps the Negro farmer to increase his earning power also helps the white citizen to make genuine progress :

During 1916, so Mr. Pierce reports to Bradford Knapp, Chief of the States Relations Service, South, 449 Negro corn demonstrators in Virginia, cultivating 2150 acres under improved methods, secured an average yield of 33 bushels per acre.

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This was an increased yield of 9.9 bushels on demonstration plots over plots cultivated by ordinary methods.

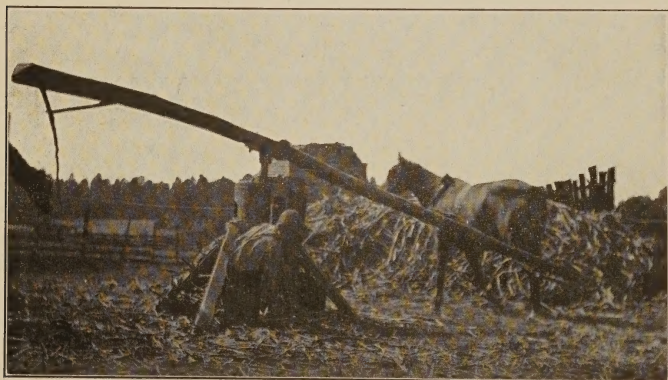
In addition, 1001 coöperators reported a yield of 24 bushels per acre on 1952 acres.

Granting that a similar result could be obtained by all those who raise corn, if only education could be carried on broadly, Virginia in a single year would add \$10,000,000 to the value of her output of corn.

Who dares to be skeptical or cynical of the Negroes' interest in better methods of farming, in the light of these facts?

WORKING FOR RESULTS

Corresponding results have been secured in the small grains demonstrations. The average yield of oats per acre on demon-



GRINDING CANE FOR HOME USE

stration plots was 18.9 bushels, representing an increased yield of 5.7 bushels and of wheat 16.1 bushels, representing an increased yield of 5.5 bushels.

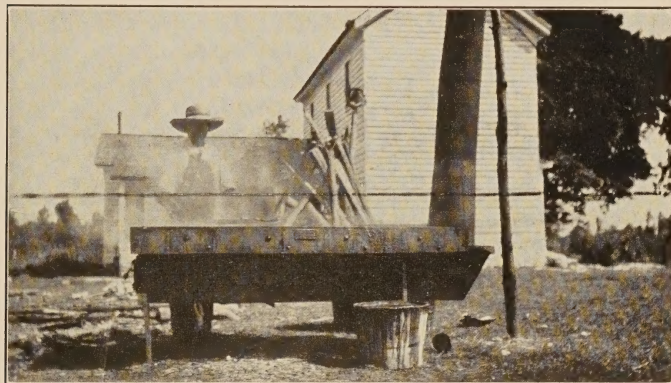
Today, over 1000 Negro farmers are using better methods of growing small grains on account of the Government's interest in them.

Does all this pay in dollars and cents, in increased interest in farming, in better homes? To ask the question is to answer it: *Certainly.*

Hay, forage, cover crops! These words commonly mean little. To the Negro farmer of Virginia they now spell success on the land. The local demonstration agents have worked night and day to make farmers understand the importance of making the land produce (without wearing it out) more food for man and beast.

There are other chapter headings for this story of awakening life on the farm—summer legumes, demonstrations in potato-growing, orcharding, hog and poultry raising, soil fertilization, rural organization, farmstead improvement, and new hope for discouraged farmers and their families.

“Community development along all good lines!” This is the object of the 134 Negro farmers’ clubs which were organized in 1916 throughout Virginia through the coöperation of John B. Pierce, and sixteen local demonstration agents, working under the States Relations Service and the Extension Division of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute at Blacksburg.



HOME-MADE SYRUP MAKES HAPPY FOLKS.

The total membership of the clubs was 1838 and represented a progressive, far-sighted group of Negro farmers in the Old Dominion.

These clubs made a good beginning in coöperation by buying 2234 tons of lime.

Five of the local agents also kept a bulletin board, listing goods for sale and goods wanted.

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS

What do the local demonstration agents do besides helping the farmers till their land and grow better crops? Here is a partial list, based on Mr. Pierce's 1916 report, of the farm and farmstead improvements which the Negro farmers of Virginia have made with the advice and assistance of the agents:

Buildings erected	130
Farm buildings painted or whitewashed	552

Sanitary conditions (farm and home) improved	933
Homes screened against flies	837
Farmers furnished with plans and induced to adopt a systematic rotation	136
Total acreage put under rotation	1695
Drainage system established	39
Home water systems installed or improved	55
Home gardens planted or improved	1198
Home grounds improved	394
Farmers induced to save surplus farm products for winter use	1578

Can there be any question that the work of the local agent is limited merely to helping the farmer grow more crops so that he can secure more money to raise more crops, and so go round in a vicious circle ?



SAVING AND CURING COW-PEA HAY

The facts show clearly the interest of the local agent in helping the farmer to help himself and his family to a higher plane of living.

That increased earning power is an important and basal factor must be evident to the careful observer of rural conditions.

That better living is a worthy goal for the hard-working farmer and his family is recognized by those who are engaged in carrying to the Negro farmers of Virginia a gospel of hope which is based upon intelligent work and Christian good-will.

A bird's-eye view of the work of John B. Pierce and his loyal associates in the farm-demonstration movement throughout Virginia, reveals the importance of helping the man on the land to better his own condition. It also discloses the peaks or high



THESE BOYS ARE SERVING THEIR COUNTRY.

points in the movement for bringing the teachings of the school to men who have had relatively few advantages but who are nevertheless ready to work for better farming results.

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

During 1916, Mr. Pierce and the local agents visited 5622 demonstrators, 2627 coöperators, 2657 other farmers, 867 business men, 767 boys' and girls' club members ; traveled 61,998 miles (railroad, 22,130 and team 39,868) ; held 527 farmers' meetings ; addressed 35,753 people at 864 meetings ; held 302 field meetings and reached 2317 people ; prepared for publication 30 articles ; distributed 7037 bulletins or circulars of the U. S. Department of Agriculture ; and visited 236 schools.



FIFTY BUSHEL TO THE ACRE AND DONE BY TWO BOYS !

The agents spent about 60 per cent of their time in field work and devoted the remaining time to farming their own land.

In fourteen counties they helped in organizing fairs in which 15,006 demonstrators, coöperators, and club members had exhibits and won 942 prizes.

These agents helped 135 farmers to keep complete cost records and 368 farmers to keep partial cost records.

Today there are at least 759 Negro farmers in Virginia who are practicing fall plowing as a result of the county-agent work; 401 farmers are selecting seed; and 74 farmers are growing sugar cane or sorghum for syrup.

These figures, while in some ways striking, are as nothing compared to the story which they suggest of a richer, fuller, happier life for the Negro farmer who, only a short time ago, was the toy of the city-dweller and the butt of crude jokesmiths.



GOOD LIVE STOCK : SECRET OF FARM SUCCESS

NEW HOPE FOR FARMERS

The human-interest features of this constructive work stand clearly forth in the following statements of fact covering the work of the calendar year 1916:

Demonstrators and coöperators raising practically all their home supplies	2642
Opening new bank accounts since beginning demonstration work	306
Increasing bank accounts since beginning demonstration work	448
Owning their farms	3307
Labor-saving devices installed in homes	370
Demonstrators and coöperators decreasing their indebtedness	55%
Showing increased interest in agricultural meetings	66%
Showing a desire to study their farm business and progress	77%

The lateral influence of this work simply must be very great: first, because there are so many lives that are involved in it;

second, because the work is becoming better organized year by year: and, third, because more and more emphasis is being placed on its character-building possibilities—both for those who learn and those who teach.

As Dr. Edward Everett Hale used to say of Hampton, so today thoughtful men and women may say of this work: "What is better worth doing?"

Who is John B. Pierce? By what methods has he brought about such practical and helpful coöperation between white and black men, between farmers and representatives of the U. S. Government, between country and city folks? Briefly these are the facts:

John Baptiste Pierce of Greenville, Ala., attended Tuskegee Institute, from which he was graduated. He entered Hampton Institute in the fall of 1899 and completed the agricultural post-graduate course in June, 1902. His record as a worker and a student was excellent. In the Hampton battalion he served for one year as a private and for two years as a captain. As a class-room teacher at Hampton he was distinctly successful.

AGRICULTURAL MISSIONARY

His real opportunity for growth, however, after years of hard work and careful training, came in 1907. Then, at the suggestion of Hampton's Principal, Dr. H. B. Frissell, he was sent to Gloucester County, Va., where Hampton graduates were already doing good work, to carry into practice the plan of having farmers till their land according to scientific principles.

He has repeatedly been referred to as an "agricultural missionary."

He has given his entire strength of body, mind, and heart to the work of showing his people how to secure better money returns for their crops, more home comforts, and a happier life in the country.

He has carried, with persistence, intelligence, and Christian fervor, the message of "better farms, better homes, better schools, and better health," which the Negro Organization Society of Virginia has made so popular.

